United Nations A/59/PV.43

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

43rd plenary meeting
Wednesday, 27 October 2004, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 113 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

The Acting President: Before we turn to the item on our agenda, I should like to inform members that, since the issuance of document A/59/430, Malawi has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: This information will be reflected in document A/59/430/Add.1, to be issued tomorrow morning.

Agenda item 40 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/59/274)

Mr. Satjipanon (Thailand): Thailand believes that children are not only our hearts, but also our future. Because of their importance and vulnerability, it is the responsibility of every parent, every society and every State to ensure their safety, their well-being and the full realization of their potential.

Thailand attaches great importance to the outcome of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, which was devoted to children. Accordingly, Thailand's draft national strategy and plan of action for "a world fit for children" for 2005-2015 has been formulated on the basis of the framework of the final document adopted at that special session (resolution S-27/2), with the addition of certain aspects that are pertinent to the situation in Thai society. The ministry concerned recently completed the process of public hearings on the draft national strategy and plan of action. It is expected that the revised draft national strategy and plan of action will be ready for submission to the Cabinet for approval by the end of this year. For Thailand, it is important to ensure the participation of children and young people in Government-led decision-making processes that may concern their own interests and well-being. Children and civil society have taken part in the drafting of the national strategy and plan of action at both the national and the local levels.

My delegation finds the report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the special session on children (A/59/274) to be of great assistance in helping us to further improve our draft national strategy and plan of action and to operationalize the goals set out in the report. In addition to identifying the progress made, the

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problems that remain and further actions that need to be taken, the Secretary-General's report provides us with a comprehensive picture of the linkages among the objectives of the special session, the Millennium Development Goals and the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report and to commend the United Nations agencies concerned — in particular UNICEF — for their active and tireless efforts to assist countries in realizing their goals aimed at building a world fit for children.

My delegation wishes to share its views on certain issues that were highlighted in the outcome document of the special session.

The first issue is saving our children from HIV/AIDS. For more than a decade Thailand has striven to limit mother-to-child transmission of the virus. Remarkable success has been achieved since the year 2000, when the Ministry of Public Health issued clinical guidelines setting out standard practices aimed at preventing mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission, developed a national plan and policy on HIV/AIDS and launched a national programme based on that policy. It has been estimated that without such efforts almost 5,000 children would have been born HIV-positive by the year 2003. The national programme is believed to have contributed to the reduction of that number by up to 50 per cent.

Despite the achievements, Thailand is aware that the path ahead remains long. Indeed, no country can ever become complacent about the silent killer named HIV/AIDS, which poses a global threat to human security. As the host of the Fifteenth International AIDS Conference, held in Bangkok in July 2004, Thailand ensured that particular emphasis was placed on the increasingly young and female faces of the victims of HIV/AIDS, on the problems of children living with and orphaned by HIV/AIDS and on the need for enhanced sharing of best practices and global partnerships to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In addition to being concerned about the problems of children living with or orphaned by HIV/AIDS, Thailand shares the international community's concern with protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence. Thailand is particularly concerned about the interlinkages among problems such as child trafficking, child sex tourism and child pornography, which are complex in nature. They are even more difficult to fight when they are of a cross-border nature, are linked with national or transnational criminal organizations and/or involve the misuse of advanced information technology such as the Internet.

Thailand believes that States have the primary responsibility for combating and eradicating those problems in their countries. However, it is also realistic to observe that, because of the complexity, magnitude and transboundary nature of those problems, partnerships at the local, regional and global levels are essential to effectively address them. Such national, regional and global efforts need to comprehensively address, inter alia, three key issues. These are the interlinkages among the problems; their root causes, which may include poverty, dysfunctional family structures, political situations and instability; and the need to tackle the problems from the demand and the supply sides, according equal importance to both.

Strategies should focus on the following. First, we need prevention measures targeting perpetrators and potential violators, and secondly, there should be protection measures targeting children who may be at risk or have fallen prey to those violators. Thirdly, prosecution measures should target perpetrators and violators. That would require the strengthening of legal and judicial processes, as well as international enforcement cooperation for crimes of a transborder nature. Fourthly, measures should focus on child victims not only in terms of physical health but also their psychological rehabilitation, as a child's mind is much more difficult to heal than his or her body.

Our system also needs to ensure the smooth reintegration of victimized children into society, as well as measures to prevent the child from being victimized again. On society's part, social services can be important in order to ensure greater effectiveness of the measures introduced and implemented to protect children from harm.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to update the Assembly on some national legislative and administrative measures that Thailand has undertaken to better protect our children against abuse, exploitation and violence.

Recent important measures include the Child Protection Act. This law, which came into effect on 13 March this year, is intended to protect children from

all form of abuse, exploitation, violence and gross negligence by clearly stipulating that any child below the age of 18 is protected by the State. The law is consistent with every international legal instrument concerning children, as it attaches primary importance to maximum benefits for children, prohibits unfair discrimination and provides protection to every child in the country.

To ensure the efficient implementation of the Child Protection Act and to ensure a disciplined approach in addressing the matter, a Child Protection Committee has been set up at both the national and the provincial district level, comprising representatives of Government agencies, non-governmental organizations and experts working for child protection. The Committee is now in full operation at all levels.

As to the international human rights instrument related to child protection, Thailand submitted its second national report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in April of this year and is awaiting another presentation of its report to the Committee. To ensure children's involvement in this important monitoring process, the Government also supports the submission of a report to the Committee that is elaborated entirely by children.

Indeed, the Thai Government attaches great importance to the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It has extended its full support to the Committee's request to hold a subregional workshop in Bangkok in mid-November with the aim of assisting the Governments of Thailand, Viet Nam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and India in implementing the Committee's recommendations this year. Other measures that Thailand has undertaken are further elaborated in the statement we have circulated.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to assure the Assembly of Thailand's continued commitment to the realization of the goals of the General Assembly's special session on children, as well as the Millennium Development Goals, and to full compliance with its obligations under the relevant international instruments related to the protection of children to which it is either already a party or intends soon to become a party. We look forward to working with other countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to create a world fit for our children and the children of the world.

Mr. Komar (Indonesia): I am delivering this statement on behalf of Ambassador Adiyatwidi Adiwoso Asmady, who is not able to be with us this afternoon.

On behalf of my delegation, let me first of all congratulate the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/59/274, on progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the document entitled "A World Fit for Children". Indonesia shares the view that our current progress in building a world fit for children is a major step in fulfilling the commitments made at the Millennium Summit. The agenda to build a world fit for children is an extension of the commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, owing to the very high potential of effective investments in the fields of health, education and child protection to produce significant contributions to broad-based poverty reduction and socio-economic progress.

Indonesia also welcomes the reports of those countries that have chosen to incorporate the goals and commitments of "A World Fit for Children" into other national policies and planning instruments, such as poverty reduction strategies, national development plans and sector plans, including multisectoral approaches.

Indonesia would be pleased to share its experience in that regard. Indeed, "A World Fit for Children" serves as a framework for the Government of Indonesia to promote national development planning for children and child rights-based programmes. On that basis, legislative and administrative measures have been taken and various elements of society have been involved in the implementation of relevant national action plans to create a healthy and conducive environment for children's development in Indonesia.

The most significant national developments as follow-up to the special session on children have been the promulgation of our Law No. 23 of 2002 on child protection, and the establishment of a National Committee on Child Protection. The Committee's main responsibility is to ensure the implementation of Law No. 23 through monitoring and evaluation measures.

Last July, in commemoration of National Children's Day, former President Megawati Soekarnoputri launched the National Programme for Children in Indonesia 2015, in line with the Millennium Development Goals. The Programme

covers the key issues of child health and nutrition, children and HIV/AIDS, early childhood care and development, basic nine-year education and child protection. Simultaneously, the former President also inaugurated various national campaigns on education for all, as well as a ban on smoking in school areas.

Allow me now to share with you information on some of the progress being made in Indonesia and on the challenges that affect key thematic areas pertinent to the advancement of our children's welfare.

On health issues, targets for the next five years are geared to the Government's vision of achieving a healthy Indonesia by 2010. The targets include reducing mother and infant mortality, reducing the prevalence of malnutrition among children under five years of age, increasing sanitation facilities and the supply of clean water and combating HIV/AIDS by means of the 2003-2007 National Strategy.

On education, Indonesia's Law No. 20 of 2003, on the national education system, underlines the paramount importance of education in Indonesia's overall development programme. The Law stipulates the considerable budget allocations that have to be made to support the nine-year compulsory education programme in order to enhance the quality of basic education and to provide financial support for low-income families to send their children to school.

On the issue of child abuse, various policy measures have been taken to address this scourge, both at the national and regional levels. Currently, Indonesia is implementing three National Action Plans on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking in women and children. Fully aware of the transborder characteristic of such issues, the Indonesian Government, in close collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and with the participation of its neighbours in the region, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and Australia, organized last February the Batam Conference and endorsed a series of concerted actions to combat the widespread commercial sexual exploitation of children in the region.

In Geneva last January, the Indonesian Government conducted a dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to consider Indonesia's second periodic report. The dialogue was extremely fruitful and productive. Knowing the overriding importance of that dialogue for continued progress in implementing the various commitments under the Convention, several recommendations and observations made by the Committee were taken into consideration and integrated into national strategies in line with Indonesian policies on children.

At the regional level, my delegation would like to reaffirm its commitment to the Bali Consensus — the outcome of the sixth East Asian and the Pacific Ministerial Consultation on Children in 2003, and looks forward to actively participating in the forthcoming meeting in Cambodia early next year. Indonesia is of the view that regional initiatives play a significant role in achieving further progress in realizing a world fit for children.

Indonesia also shares the analysis that the strengths and weaknesses in the follow-up process vary at all levels and along various dimensions. Specific attention should be given to measures to strengthen synergy between the goals of the Millennium Declaration and those set by the special session on children. The strong focus on the goals of the Millennium Declaration that are relevant to the lives of children has created a positive synergy with the goals of "A world fit for children".

The fact that the Millennium Development Goals benefit from widespread support from agencies whose mandate is not specifically action for children means that issues relating to children are now high on the international agenda. Indonesia is of the view that every country should make maximum use of such an encouraging ambience to boost its progress towards implementing the "A world fit for children" goals at the national level.

Against that backdrop, Indonesia highly appreciates the significant contributions of the relevant United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in assisting countries to ensure the fulfilment of commitments to their children. Indonesia also calls on the agencies concerned to deepen cooperation and assistance for sustainable progress. In that context, it is particularly essential to emphasize the fact that most of the goals of "A world fit for children" will be achieved only if Governments scale up their efforts through both resource allocation and action at the political level.

To conclude, since the future of the nation depends so much on the well-being of its children, the Government of Indonesia is fully determined to move ahead with the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and ensure that "A World Fit for Children" is not only an empty promise.

While fully aware of the challenges posed by weaknesses in institutional capacity, budgetary constraints, as well as conflict and instability, we are all obliged to exert ourselves to convert this promise into reality. In this regard, our newly elected President, in his official statement after his inauguration last week, emphasized his commitment to poverty eradication, education and health improvement, as well as good governance, all of which will clearly create a conducive environment for the implementation of "A world fit for children" in Indonesia.

Mr. Goonatilleke (Sri Lanka): At the special session of the General Assembly on children, held from 8 to 10 May 2000, delegations from 190 countries reaffirmed the international community's belief that children are the bearers of our future and our most valuable asset, when they adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A World Fit for Children".

Sixty-nine world leaders and nearly thrice as many delegations, some 1,700 representatives from non-governmental organizations and many others attending the special session committed themselves to time-bound goals for children and young people, which complement and strongly reinforce the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with a particular focus on promoting healthy lives and quality education, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS.

These are lofty goals indeed. However, for countries wallowing in extreme poverty, burdened with heavy debt servicing responsibilities and impoverished by falling prices for their export commodities, investing in health and education and protecting children from abuse and exploitation are distant goals, or even distant dreams. By now, we are aware of the magnitude of the responsibilities the developing and least developed countries will have to shoulder, in a world where we spend as much as $1 trillion per annum on armaments and a mere $57 billion for development aid.

Let us, for example, consider the hefty investment needed to achieve just one of the eight Millennium Goals, namely, education, which requires that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, complete a full course of primary schooling. To fulfil that goal, each country will have to provide education to all of its children, and given the inability of the majority of families in the developing and least-developed countries to come up with requisite costs, for instance school fees, such education will have to be provided free of cost. Such a decision, on the part of Governments having to finance public school systems, will lead to enormous pressures owing to massive new enrolments with the result that the available infrastructure will be exhausted.

To begin with, new classrooms will have to be built and teachers will have to be recruited and trained, in order to bring the teacher-to-student ratio to an acceptable and manageable level. Moreover, those Governments will have to consider how the poorer students will gain access to essential textbooks and uniforms.

Bearing in mind that the majority of the new student population will be coming from poverty-stricken families, who are not adequately fed — remember that children dizzy with hunger will not be able to focus on their studies — authorities will have to find ways and means of providing for the minimal nutritional needs of children. Resources required for those activities are going to further burden already impoverished countries.

The answer to that dilemma is to assist Governments with required resources, in a sustainable manner, until that Millennium Goal is met. According to current estimates, an additional $50 billion per annum will be required to attain that and other Millennium Development Goals. Without achieving the 0.7 per cent official development assistance (ODA) target, it will be a nearly impossible task to achieve those goals.

In her address to the special session on children, the President of Sri Lanka quoted the Lord Buddha, who more than 2,500 years ago discussed the value of children. In that discourse, he asked "What is mankind's treasure?" and he replied "children are mankind's treasure". Thus, in two short sentences the Lord Buddha said what is relevant to all societies at all

times: there is no treasure more valuable to mankind than our children.

Children under the age of 18 years constitute approximately 36 per cent of Sri Lanka's population of nearly 20 million. Sri Lanka has placed children's rights high on its political agenda.

Sri Lanka has literacy rates of over 90 per cent for men and women, bearing testimony to our longstanding commitment to education without gender disparity. Since 1945, education in Sri Lanka has been free from the primary to the tertiary level. Further, assistance in the form of free textbooks, uniforms and scholarships for schoolchildren is provided, and there is a scholarship system for needy undergraduates. This enables even the poorest of our children to aspire to all the opportunities our society offers. Moreover, education is compulsory from five to 14 years of age, and the minimum employment age has been raised to 14. This has helped to check child labour, which occurs mostly in the informal sector.

For several decades, health care has been accorded the same level of priority as education. Free health-care services are available to all Sri Lankans. We are proud of the consequent low rates of infant, child and maternal mortality; the significant reduction in the low-birth- weight rate; and the low birth rate. A sustained commitment to develop health and educational services has led to high socio-economic indicators for a country of our income range.

However, given the high level of poverty in certain areas of the country, malnutrition among children has become a worrisome factor. Lower-income families are being provided with State assistance through the Poverty Alleviation Programme carried out by the Government. We have to admit that over the years, budgetary allocations for education and health care have come under considerable pressure. One of Sri Lanka's greatest challenges in recent times has been protecting children from the impact of the two-decades-long armed conflict. Nevertheless, all children living in conflict-affected areas of the country are provided with health care and educational facilities at Government expense. Programmes are under way to increase vocational and technical training facilities to school-leavers in those areas.

Tragically, Sri Lanka continues to face the problem of the recruitment of children as armed combatants — some of whom as young as 10 years old — by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). According to reports received by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 4,552 child combatants under the age of 18 were recruited by the LTTE between 1 April 2001 and 30 September 2004, despite the commitment made by that organization in 1998 to Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, that it would not recruit children under the age of 17 and would stop using children under the age of 18 in armed hostilities.

The Government is appreciative of the role played by UNICEF in pursuing relentlessly with the LTTE the issue of child combatants and in making arrangements to rehabilitate those children released from time to time by the LTTE.

Sri Lanka is pleased to state that, following the participation of the President of Sri Lanka in the special session on children, the Government of Sri Lanka launched a National Plan of Action for Children for the period 2004-2008. The overall strategy set out in the Plan is to ensure universal access to the services that children require for their full and free development as well as to provide them with the opportunity to develop their individual capacities in a safe and enabling environment. It seeks to direct attention and resources to those areas which are neglected or under-resourced in ongoing Government programmes.

For example, in our country, which is emerging from a two-decades-long armed conflict, the present system of education does not, in the curriculum and school programmes, adequately cover ways substantially to improve race relations or to promote a greater understanding of the cultural and religious heritages and democratic traditions of our country. Therefore, the promotion of values such as peace and social harmony will receive a high priority in the National Plan of Action.

A needs assessment of conflict-affected areas and regions bordering such areas has been carried out by donor agencies, and the aspects that need immediate action have been identified. These include the restoration of damaged physical infrastructure, the special needs of children affected by conflict, non-formal education and, in the short term, reintegrating children who have been internally displaced.

The importance of regular monitoring has been recognized in terms of the effective implementation of

the National Plan of Action. A number of steering and coordinating mechanisms have been set up at different subnational levels to address this concern. This includes monthly review meetings at the provincial level and a quarterly progress report.

In closing, I want to share with the Assembly our children's vision for Sri Lanka. Children participating in the process of designing the National Plan of Action were asked what sort of a world they would like to live in, in 10 years' time. They responded: "We want to see a Sri Lanka that is peaceful and prospering; a world that provides equal opportunities for children; a pleasant tomorrow for every child".

Mr. Leslie (Belize): My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Barbados on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

My delegation also thanks the Secretary-General for presenting the comprehensive report we have before us today. The report shows that there have been mixed results thus far in implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the special session, and that, unfortunately, there has been a lack of consistent and systematic follow-up to this point. My delegation trusts that our consideration of this item at this session will provide a new impetus to the critical follow-up process.

At the special session in May 2002, delegations from 190 countries adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children". It committed Governments to a time-bound set of goals for children and young people. But we know that this is not enough; it cannot be enough when every year more than 10 million children die before they reach the age of five, when more than 100 million, especially girls, do not go to school, and more than 60 million are engaged in child labour.

We live in a constantly changing world where, through globalization, distances have become less pronounced. Such proximity, however, has not brought us closer to one another, for globalization, as it is currently being practised, has yet to be proved beneficial to children in developing countries. Instead, it has created more poverty, and, as we all know, children are always the ones most affected.

The Millennium Goals committed us to uphold the dignity of our peoples, especially as concerns the children of the world. More specifically, we resolved by 2015 to cut the number of our poorest people by half; ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, get an education; and to stop the use of children to fight and die in armed conflict. These are our expectations, and we should do our utmost to accomplish them.

For us in Central America and the Caribbean, children form the largest part of our populations. The development of our nations is inextricably linked to their development. If we are to achieve meaningful sustainable human development, our children must go to school, have safe parks and playgrounds, be drug-free and be able to reach maturity before becoming parents.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child remains the overarching framework for Belize as it seeks to safeguard the well-being of our nation's children and meet obligations in each of the designated areas of promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence and combating HIV/AIDS.

Belize is committed to our children, and our commitment is sacred. We are continuing to make changes to improve their lives. Since 1999, the single largest portion of our national budget has been allocated to education. There has been an increase in the number of secondary schools. The Government of Belize continues to invest millions in enhancing the vocational and technical education system. Through the Ministry of Human Development, our Government has brought together the non-governmental organization community, educators and government officials to develop our own plan of action, instituted under the monitoring eye of the National Committee for Families and Children, and we continue to support the efforts of other non-governmental organizations in this field. Many of the indicators for measuring our progress towards achieving the goals of the Convention show marked improvement. We have enacted new laws for the further protection of our children, making it mandatory to report child abuse and neglect, and we have provided greater protections for children when they are complainants in a court of law. Last year, a national education summit was held, which engaged all stakeholders in discussions on the reform of the education system. Countrywide consultations were held with children so that we could get their input and recommendations.

The sad reality of abuse, violence and exploitation of children is one that none of us in the international community has been able fully to prevent. However, Belize is fully committed to eradicating practices that harm our children and prevent them from enjoying their full human rights. In December last year, Belize ratified the Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In September last year, Belize acceded to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Act was passed in June 2003. It encompasses provisions for the protection of children from all forms of trafficking, including sexual exploitation. It also contains provisions for public awareness, protection of victims' families where necessary, prosecution of offenders, compensation for victims and the compiling of statistics. A multicultural taskforce has been established to oversee implementation of the Act.

As is well known, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has ravaged the world and threatens the development prospects of many nations. The Caribbean region is the second worst affected region in the world, and Belize has not been exempted this scourge. The Government of Belize has waged an intensive campaign against the pandemic through the provision of care, treatment and prevention programmes, coupled with awareness-raising and educational activities. In 2003, the Belize Red Cross launched "Together we can", a peer education programme for adolescents that has national coverage and targets young people, who are most at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. A programme entitled "A Rapid Assessment of the Situation of Orphans and Children made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS" has recently been completed.

Belize has established a national plan of action for children and adolescents for 2004-2015. The plan provides a comprehensive framework for actions to ensure that all children in Belize live in conditions that are favourable for their optimum physical, intellectual, psychological and spiritual development.

The development of the national plan of action for children and adolescents was guided by Belize's national development priorities, as well as by key international instruments that speak to the development of children and adolescents including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on Education For All and the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children.

So, we endeavour to redouble our efforts to ensure that the children of the world, in particular the children of Belize, will continue to thrive and prosper and so that we can build a world that is truly fit for our children.

Mr. Makayat-Safouesse (Congo) (*spoke in French*): First, my delegation would like to underscore the importance we attach to the periodic review of implementation of General Assembly resolutions and the outcomes of recent United Nations conferences, in particular in the economic and social areas.

It is important that we periodically assess the progress made and the obstacles encountered in implementing on the ground the outcomes of the principal meetings convened under the auspices of the United Nations. In that respect, the summit scheduled for the sixtieth anniversary of the Organization aimed at reviewing the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals is a crucial step. Today's debate should be placed in that context. That is why my delegation would like to congratulate the Secretary-General for the excellent report (A/59/274) he has submitted in that regard.

My delegation would like to make a few observations on item 40 on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children. The thorough report of the Secretary-General underscores with certain facts that much remains to be done to build a world fit for children.

Two years ago, at the special session on children, Heads of State and Government reaffirmed in this Hall their commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and decided to change the world for children and with children.

In the declaration adopted at the end of the conference, they made a commitment to sustainable human development that takes into account the greater interests of children. Today, even if encouraging progress has been made, we have to acknowledge that we have to strive harder to attain our goals.

In fact, today, 10 million children still die of preventable and curable diseases every year. 100 million children, of which 60 per cent are girls, do not attend school. 150 million children suffer malnutrition. Millions of children are victims of HIV/AIDS, poverty,

conflicts, exclusion, discrimination and other scourges, while investment in social services in poor countries remains insufficient.

Therefore, it is crucial to continue our efforts in the four priorities defined in the declaration "A world fit for children": the promotion of healthy lives, access to quality education, protection of children against abuse, exploitation and violence and the fight against HIV/AIDS. All Member States and the entire international community are called upon directly to renew their efforts for children.

My Government shares that concern, and we have adopted various measures and taken action to promote and protect children and adolescents in what is a difficult situation.

At the institutional level, that has led to the establishment of the Ministry for Social Affairs, responsible for guiding and implementing activities to promote children, an inter-ministerial committee to promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a planning and monitoring unit, responsible for collecting, analysing and publishing information on the situation of children.

At the conceptual level, two government strategies deal with children's issues: the national plan of action for children, which sets out objectives and activities based on the recommendations of the world summit, and the national health development plan. Those mechanisms provide the framework within which my country is striving, in cooperation with its development partners, to implement the plan of action of the special session and the Millennium Development Goals.

Another important achievement in recent years has been the establishment, with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund, of a children's parliament to allow them to take part in debates and take decisions on issues that concern them. Presided over by a 17-year-old girl, that parliament serves as a forum for discussion, free expression and exchange for children and involves them in implementing the Convention, as well as in following up on its implementation. It is also called upon to teach children about their responsibilities, to serve as an advocacy tool to sensitize and educate parliament, Government authorities and civil society involved in implementing policies and programmes concerning children and to initiate legislative proposals for children and send them on to the National Assembly.

Concerning the protection of children affected by armed conflict, my country supports the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and is pleased with the efforts that the United Nations has made in establishing new instruments and standards for protecting children. It was in that context and with the goal of implementing the Ottawa Convention of 1999 that my country destroyed more than five thousand landmines in September 2003 to safeguard current and future generations from that scourge. I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to thank Canada and the United Nations for the financial and technical assistance that they have given us.

In the social sphere, the Congolese Government has decided to make its fight against poverty, which affects most children, the cornerstone of its socio-economic development policy. Thus, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Government has decided to reduce malnutrition, particularly among children under five, by adopting holistic approaches to the nutritional problems of children and others of the community, as well as by decentralizing nutritional monitoring activities. This strategy also includes strengthening the capabilities of health workers at the national level, as well as restoring basic infrastructure.

With respect to health, thousands of children continue to die before reaching the age of five. Seven out of 10 deaths are due to malaria, acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, and measles — often linked to AIDS. To remedy this problem, the Government is aiming at improving health services, strengthening the capabilities of communities, and providing nutritional education. Congo is pleased with its partnership with UNICEF in field activities, which have made it possible to alleviate the consequences of the serious humanitarian crises that have resulted from conflict and have led to the displacement of affected populations, including women and children. The distribution of drugs and food; vaccination campaigns and other activities designed to combat malaria, diarrhoea and HIV/AIDS; the establishment of psycho-social counselling services and birth registration campaigns have allowed my country, Congo, to avoid the worst.

In educational matters, our Government, along with development partners and communities, is working to restore school buildings that have been damaged by civil war and to return to the high levels of school attendance that we had until the end of the 1980s.

Indeed, according to UNICEF, the enrolment rate in primary school has dropped by 19 per cent between 1980 and 2000 because of civil wars and natural catastrophes during the 1990s. We have also noted that during the same period, 247,500 school-aged children were not enrolled in school. Therefore, the Government must increase the enrolment rate and make up for the teacher shortage, especially in rural areas, and provide training and retraining to teachers. Lastly, in the area of education, Congo is continuing its efforts to guarantee equal access to education for both boys and girls.

We have an enormous task ahead of us. The goals of reducing poverty by half and providing primary education to all children by the year 2015 and other objectives that we all espouse are completely noble and appropriate. The international community has the necessary institutional frameworks, as well as the means of implementation as defined in the outcomes of the major conferences and summits organized by the United Nations. Therefore, everyone must urgently fulfil the commitments they have undertaken, which are contained in the relevant paragraphs of the conference texts, namely the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Monterrey Consensus.

Resolution A/57/270B on the implementation and follow-up to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits should continue to inspire States, the international community and the United Nations, including international financial institutions and civil society, to become more engaged in implementing the "World Fit for Children" plan.

As far as Congo is concerned, we are determined to promote and protect the rights of children by using all of the means at our disposal and by making our contribution towards building a world of peace and prosperity for all.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like to express gratitude to the Secretary-General for this report on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children in document A/59/274, where there is a detailed description of the progress made in implementing the commitments set forth in the final document of the twenty-seventh special session of the Assembly, which is entitled, "A World Fit for Children".

The protection of the rights of the child is a priority of Kazakhstan's national policy. Today, there are more than five million children living in our country. Each and every one of them, in accordance with the constitution of Kazakhstan, has the right to be taken care of and nurtured and to receive support from the State. The general principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have been integrated into normative legal documents and national programmes adopted by our country between 1998 and 2004. With the active involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a national working group and an inter-agency commission, as well as bodies that work on issues relating to issues of custody and guardianship, have been set up in order to protect the rights of children.

For Kazakhstan, the outcome of the General Assembly's special session on children is particularly pertinent. During the special session, a declaration and a plan of action were adopted entitled "A World Fit for Children". The set of measures that has been approved by the community of nations for achieving specific objectives in favour of children and youth makes it possible to work in an efficacious and targeted manner in different regions in order to develop national plans of action.

The positive results of the work in Kazakhstan aimed at implementing the commitments of the special session have spurred further progress in taking effective measures to protect children — first and foremost children no longer cared for by their parents, sick children, and children with behavioural problems. In our country, we see a stabilization of the socio-economic situation and our basic demographic indicators are more encouraging. For instance, beginning in the year 2000, for the first time in a long time there has been an increase in the birth rate and also an increase in the population itself. The mortality rate has plateaued. With a view to reducing infant mortality and the incidence of early childhood diseases, the Government of Kazakhstan, together with international organizations, is implementing a number of programmes, such as "safe motherhood", neonatal care, immunization, comprehensive monitoring of

childhood diseases, prevention of mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission, promotion of breastfeeding, as well as others. Kazakhstan is providing targeted assistance to over 600,000 children in order to assist underprivileged families and families with many children. It has also established a literacy fund in all public schools, for which local authorities must annually earmark at least 1 per cent of their expenditures for schools.

Kazakhstan understands the importance of effectively eradicating child labour and has therefore ratified the International Labour Organization's Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, as well as the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

In education, work is under way to identify the main areas that need to be reformed. Kazakhstan has designed a concept for the development of education that will be in effect until the year 2015. At present we are focusing on the quality of education and are working to enhance a new series of textbooks and professional training programmes for teachers.

Among efforts to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS, special education programmes have been designed and implemented to create a safe and enabling environment for children, parents and teachers. Kazakhstan attaches great importance to preventing and protecting children from cruel treatment, sexual exploitation and exploitation through child labour. It has therefore ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child — one, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the other, on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

At present, the Government of Kazakhstan is developing various programmes, one of which concerns the protection of children for the period 2005-2010.

In follow-up measures to the General Assembly's special session on children, our Government participated last May in an intergovernmental meeting in Sarajevo, where it introduced a detailed report on the latest developments and achievements in Kazakhstan with respect to the protection of the rights of the child.

We are certain that effective measures in health care, education and the protection of children can help create conditions conducive to significantly reducing poverty and achieving socio-economic progress. Therefore, we hope that the United Nations system, especially UNICEF, will remain committed to supporting national initiatives and close cooperation with Governments and Member States.

The President took the Chair.

Mr. Neil (Jamaica): The Permanent Representative of Barbados spoke this morning on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and we support his statement.

I only wish now to make some additional remarks with reference to the specific measures undertaken by Jamaica to implement the Plan of Action resulting from the special session on children entitled, "A World Fit for Children".

The four core areas for action identified by the special session are health, education, protection against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

With regard to health, the Government of Jamaica has taken steps to increase prenatal care and delivery services. The result has been a reduction in infant mortality, which is now down to a rate of 24.5 per 1,000, from 27 per 1,000 in 1990. There has also been a decrease in the maternal mortality rate over the same period. In addition, child immunization coverage has increased over 95 per cent, and there is evidence from the parish clinics indicating that great strides have been made in combating malnutrition in children.

With regard to education, the improvement in early childhood education has been steady and within the framework of the Government's policy of providing universal basic education. The early childhood education and development programme emphasized the goals of increasing attendance and learning outcomes. School feeding programmes to improve nutrition for poor rural families is another aspect of the strategy for achieving those objectives.

The protection of children from abuse has been the subject of ongoing monitoring and legislation. The Offences Against the Person Act and the Domestic Violence Act have been tightened with the prohibition of ill-treatment of children, whether in the home or in public institutions. Legislation has also been enacted to

prevent sexual exploitation of children. In addition, the Child Care and Protection Act, which came into effect in March of this year, is a comprehensive regime comprising approximately 20 separate laws that provide for the safety of children and for legal protection against carnal abuse, child-stealing, and various forms of exploitation.

With regard to HIV/AIDS, continuing efforts have been made through public education to promote awareness and to reduce the risk of infection of infants. That has had some effect, and efforts are continuing to meet the target for reduction of the proportion of infected infants by 50 per cent by the year 2010.

As far as administrative mechanisms are concerned, special attention has been paid to the institutional strengthening for child protection. Jamaica's National Plan of Action for Children is a comprehensive and coordinated programme within a framework to promote the rights of the child. Under its auspices, the Child Development Agency was established to achieve holistic development through the creation, coordination and implementation of programmes and policies to meet the nation's obligations to its children. As part of that framework, there is an established child-specific human rights institution for the protection of children — a children's advocate. That office has the responsibility to review the adequacy and the effectiveness of the law and practice related to children's rights, to give information to children so that they understand the functioning of the office and to assist and act on behalf of any child whose rights have been infringed.

In addition, the juvenile unit of the police force gives support to family and juvenile courts, and a victim support unit has been established to assist child victims of violent crime. All those measures confirm the seriousness with which the Government of Jamaica has approached its obligation to promote the welfare of the nation's children and to conform with international standards.

However, much more remains to be done, especially in poorer communities. The Government of Jamaica continues to make the best use of available resources, but they are not enough to enable us to reach the targets that have been set. We therefore urge continued assistance for that purpose. We acknowledge the significant level of assistance provided by the UNICEF office in Jamaica, which has contributed immensely in making some of the gains possible through their support and collaboration.

Finally, I take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the UNICEF office for its valuable contribution to hurricane relief efforts since September, and we look forward to their continued support.

Mr. Rock (Canada): My delegation greatly appreciates this opportunity to share what we have been doing in Canada to implement the commitments flowing from "A World Fit for Children", adopted at the 2002 special session of the General Assembly on children.

Making sure that children become healthy, resilient, socially responsible and engaged citizens is a top priority for us. On 22 April 2004, the Government of Canada submitted to the United Nations its national action plan, called "A Canada Fit for Children". That document, produced with the assistance of Canadians from every sector of society, represent Canada's official response to the commitments made at the special session on children. It reflects the central issues affecting children today and suggests opportunities for action that all Canadians can take to improve the lives of children, not only in Canada but around the world.

While most children in Canada are doing well, many challenges remain. In order to address the priority areas and opportunities for action in a collaborative manner, extensive consultations were undertaken. In that regard, we involved young people in our consultations. We also engaged all levels of Government, as well as non-governmental, professional and faith-based organizations, aboriginal groups, individuals and the private sector. Those consultations confirmed the four basic themes of our national plan of action: supporting families and strengthening communities, promoting healthy lives, protecting children from harm and promoting education and learning. Those themes are consistent with the Government of Canada's agenda for children, as well as with "A World Fit for Children".

(*spoke in French*)

Our plan of action, "A Canada Fit for Children", also underscores the importance that Canada attaches to playing our role in helping children around the world. We continue to implement the action plan on child protection of the Canadian International

Development Agency (CIDA), with its strategic focus on supporting child labourers and children affected by war.

CIDA will devote $122 million over a five-year period to projects to help those children. While Canada is committed to the achievement of all Millennium Development Goals, it is especially focusing on goals related to children. For example, Canada has promised to double its investment in basic education in Africa by 2005, which means that by 2005 we will invest $100 million annually to help achieve the goal of universal primary education in Africa. Those resources are in addition to Canada's commitment to quadruple its development assistance for basic education by 2005.

In addition Canada has taken legislative measures to protect children from exploitation. Moreover, in 2005, we will be holding a North American consultation with respect to the United Nations study on violence against children. We want to ensure that children and youth will participate both in the preparatory process and the consultations themselves.

We will continue to cooperate to ensure that all children have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become healthy and engaged individuals. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada is committed to ensuring that children's best interests play a central role in all our programmes and policies. That commitment is clearly reflected in "A Canada Fit for Children", which calls upon all Canadians to consider how they can contribute to improving the lives of all children.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is with great pleasure that we meet today, as children's issues occupy a prominent place on the agenda of the United Nations, as well as on the agendas of the world's countries and organizations. There is hardly a United Nations document, whether of the General Assembly or the Security Council, that does not make reference to children and the need to consider their interests in times of peace or in armed conflicts.

Because my Government believes that today's children are tomorrow's leaders and that their upbringing, protection and strong development are the foundation for a better future society, children's issues hold a special place in our priorities. That is reflected in national plans carried out at the highest level of authority in Syria, as President Bashar Al-Assad attaches great importance to children's issues and follows the projects and activities that serve the interests and care of children in rural and urban areas.

The Supreme Committee for Children, comprised of Government and non-governmental authorities, was established in 1999 to address children's issues and monitor implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, to which Syria acceded in 1993, in addition to implementing the outcome of the 2002 United Nations special session on children. In this regard, the Syrian Government has formulated the National Plan of Action, a forward-looking plan to promote the interests of Syrian children, which will be in effect from now until the year 2015 and includes the areas of health and education, as well as cultural aspects, protection of children from HIV/AIDS, violence and exploitation, and providing care for those with special needs. Health care and mandatory education are provided at no expense to all boys and girls in Syria.

We note that there has been a great increase in the rate of student enrolment — especially at the first level of basic education — and a reduction in the dropout rate in schools. The Ministry of Education is also developing educational curricula, especially by introducing the concept of the rights of the child in the basic curricula. It is also noteworthy that the percentage of females is 48 per cent of the total number of students at the primary and secondary levels.

My delegation has hosted a national conference on childhood, under the auspices of the wife of the President, in February 2004. A number of decisions were adopted, most important of which were the establishment of a national monitor for children, with the possibility of a follow-up to its implementation plan, and the implementation of legislation to protect children, to receive complaints and to provide a database on children.

The Syrian Arab Republic participated in the third Arab Conference on the Rights of the Child, which was held in Tunisia, at the beginning of this year and was centred around the Arab Plan of Action for Children. That Plan will constitute another resource for Arab States in formulating their plans concerning children.

At the international level, Syria has acceded to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the

Rights of the Child and to ILO Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment. The employment age in Syria has been raised to 15 years. Syria has also acceded to ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. In that context, we would like to commend the work of UNICEF, its Executive Director Mrs. Carol Bellamy, the UNICEF Offices in the Middle East and the Damascus office for their efforts in the interests of children.

In spite of the achievements made in the area of children's rights and care, my Government can not provide for all of the children of Syria, since thousands of Syrian children are still living, since 1967, under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan. Those children, just like their Palestinian brothers and sisters, suffer daily from the arbitrary actions of the occupation authorities, such as the closing and destruction of educational institutions. There are also many instances where Arab textbooks and curricula have been prohibited and Israeli curricula have been imposed, in an attempt to erase the national identity of younger generations.

We hope Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, will follow the situation of those children so as to familiarize the international community with their tragedy and to compel Israel to respect their rights, especially their right to life.

Acting in the best interest of children and keeping up with the challenges that this involves, in order to arrive at appropriate solutions to the problems of children without selectivity or double standards, is an endless task. We would like to affirm that the United Nations and its specialized agencies are quite capable of coordinating our efforts and mobilizing our potential to secure a better tomorrow for posterity and for humanity in its entirety.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): We meet today to discuss how far we have come in achieving the goals of the outcome of the document entitled, "A World Fit for Children" and to learn lessons on how to strengthen our efforts so that we can achieve the goals that have not yet been achieved. We wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the follow-up to the special session on children, contained in document A/59/274.

Uganda experienced an unsettled period for approximately ten years owing to a number of dictatorial regimes that destroyed public infrastructure and the delivery of social services to the detriment of good governance. As a result, infant mortality rates were high.

Since the National Resistance Movement Government took over power in Uganda in 1986, the country has been rehabilitated. This has enabled us to achieve some of the targets, including ensuring children's health and nutrition, lowering the infant mortality rate, ensuring universal primary education, ensuring safe childbirth, family planning and poverty eradication and encouraging sustained economic growth and mainstreaming the targets in the poverty eradication plan.

In the area of promoting healthy lives, the Government of Uganda has rehabilitated the health infrastructure. Medical personnel are being trained and safe motherhood is increasingly being implemented so that women can access family planning and childbirth care. Interventions in that regard are both family- and community-based.

Over 84 per cent of children countrywide are immunized and the Roll Back Malaria global partnership is helping in the establishment of strategic plans for controlling that disease, including the use of preventive measures like mosquito nets and the timely treatment of children. The Government is determined to decisively reverse the infant mortality rate, which has increased slightly owing to the onset of HIV/AIDS.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), have been instrumental, in particular, in the drive to help developing countries to obtain high-quality, low-cost vaccines.

Safe water coverage in Uganda has risen from 10 per cent in 1986 to 60 per cent today countrywide, and from 17 per cent to 70 per cent in urban areas.

To provide quality education, the Government of Uganda embarked on a programme of universal primary education, which has led to a rise in enrolment levels from 2.5 million in 1986 to 7.5 million today. The number of classrooms has been increased and the target is to have 148,000 primary school classrooms by the year 2007. Primary school teachers have also been increased by approximately 30,000. Some children are

enrolled in private primary schools, owing to Uganda's dual-track policy, whereby with a liberalized school system the private sector can relieve some of the State's burden.

Under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, Uganda has been able to increase spending for its primary schools, thanks to debt rescheduling and forgiveness. Uganda will be embarking on universal secondary education in the near future and the school curricula are being improved through the elimination of gender biases.

Non-governmental organizations are working with the Government of Uganda to help provide education to all children. At the request of the Government, Save the Children has, for example, been successfully implementing the Child-centred Alternatives for Non-formal Community-based Education (CHANCE) programme, since 1999. That is helping children who might not otherwise be attending school at all.

When combating HIV/AIDS in Uganda, a political commitment at the highest level, coupled with openness about the problem, has translated into support programmes and advocacy for better policies and programmes, including safe motherhood, a sexual reproductive health policy of expanding the number of mother- and child-friendly hospitals, decentralization to reach in particular mothers at the grass-root level, prevention of mother-to-child transmission involving the administration of free antiretroviral drugs, voluntary counselling and testing and the education of girl children. Awareness campaigns are facilitating informed decision-making, especially among HIV-positive couples, and are encouraging behavioural change through our programme known as ABC, for abstinence, being faithful and — if you cannot avoid it — the use of contraceptives.

HIV/AIDS is the fourth leading cause of death among children under five years of age. It has also led to many children being orphaned, and children who are HIV-positive are susceptible to other diseases. In schools, weekly sensitization seminars are delivered by head teachers with well-packaged guidelines formulated by all stakeholders. UNICEF has been helpful by working with the Government to improve the well-being of orphans and other vulnerable children and to promote the rights of children through the training of child rights advocates.

I recently addressed the Security Council on the subject of threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts. I spoke in particular of the efforts that the Government of Uganda is undertaking to protect children against abuse, exploitation and violence with regard to armed conflict.

The Government of Uganda has been fighting a lone battle to rescue children who have been maimed, abducted, sexually abused and killed by the terrorist organization known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). All those atrocities have been committed solely by that rebel terrorist group. The war against the terrorists has been largely successful lately and a number of rebel commanders have been captured or killed. There is amnesty for the rebels who lay down their arms, and many are doing so and are being reintegrated into society.

The rebels have ignored the call for dialogue because they have no political or moral agenda. Internally displaced persons will be enabled to return to their homes soon. In the interim, the Government of Uganda has paid school fees for all students whose parents are in camps and those students are now going to school. Uganda is grateful to agencies such as UNICEF for their assistance in that respect.

The Government of Uganda has drawn up a comprehensive post-conflict rehabilitation and development programme for northern Uganda, where the atrocities have been committed. We appeal to the international community to support it and to comply with any arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for members of the rebel group.

My delegation regrets that the noble cause of protecting children, in particular in situations of armed conflict, has been politicized by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Special Representative has ignored non-State actors who are responsible for atrocities committed against children. He has not proposed a clear way forward to deal with them and has therefore compromised his mandate.

The Government of Uganda has invited the Special Representative to undertake a visit to northern Uganda to obtain the facts on the ground, but he continues to misrepresent or ignore altogether the issue which affects his own people. The Special Representative has, to date, ignored that invitation, which leads one to draw the conclusion that he is

preoccupied with an agenda that undermines the interests of the children of northern Uganda.

In that regard, our concerns are borne out by the recent findings of the Secretary-General concerning shortcomings in the Office of the Special Representative in addressing issues and concerns relating to children and armed conflict. We regret to note that some of those shortcomings are evident in his handling of the reporting and monitoring mechanism on children and armed conflict.

It is therefore crucial that the Secretary-General immediately undertake the streamlining of the response of the United Nations system to children affected by armed conflict to correct those shortcomings. That will ensure that children around the world will be accorded equal attention, with the impartiality and seriousness that the issue deserves. The reporting and monitoring mechanism should accommodate the views of all stakeholders and should be implemented in a rigorous and transparent manner. A mechanism emerging from the 1996 Graça Machel report, entitled, "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children", should be handled in the spirit intended for it, which is with transparency, objectiveness, inclusiveness and impartiality, rather than by means of ad hoc briefings, as has been the case.

What is the way forward? The way forward for developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa in particular, where chronic poverty remains a major obstacle to the realization by children of all their rights, includes the cooperation of development partners. Underdevelopment, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, has to be reversed through equitable access to trade opportunities. Debt forgiveness and rescheduling should be broadened in that regard to help mitigate many of the problems that Governments have to deal with in trying to guarantee human rights to all children.

The international community should do more to assist countries experiencing terrorist attacks, in particular those by non-State actors, who are the main culprits in subjecting children to violence, exploitation and abuse. We should all work together in a comprehensive manner so that we can all succeed in creating a world fit for children.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): Speaking on the question of the follow-up to the special session on children, first allow me to express our sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/59/274. Looking back to the period since his first report (A/58/333) was submitted to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, we are pleased to observe that the situation described in the present report is much more encouraging.

Progress is reflected in the number of countries that have completed or that are developing or plan to develop national plans for children, or that are incorporating the goals and commitments of "A World Fit for Children" into their national policy and planning instruments. Also very important, is the fact that the overall rate of such progress is more even.

The Secretary-General reports that altogether at least 170 countries have either taken or foresee taking some form of action to put the goals of the special session on children into operation. That is a further indication of the shared consensus of the international community on the necessity and urgency of building a better world — a world more fit for future generations.

We are particularly pleased to note that in many countries there has been, or there has been more, coordination in the designing or implementation of national plans for children or other national plans, especially with respect to poverty reduction and national development. From our own experience, we consider this important in ensuring the cost-effectiveness of the projects, the durability of efforts and the sustainability of progress.

For years now, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) has been in place guiding development activities in dozens of countries. One of the most prominent features of UNDAF is ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders, including Governments, United Nations agencies and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations, in developing projects and plans. In his report, the Secretary-General indicated that many Governments had used a broad consultative process for developing plans of actions and other responses. That UNDAF-like approach should be encouraged.

Regional mechanisms are playing important roles in an increasing number of domains of multilateral activities. The number of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations testifies to that healthy tendency. With the consensus of the international community on the need to enhance cooperation in action for children, Viet Nam sees the

potential for regional mechanisms to play even greater roles in that connection. We look forward to actively participating in the forthcoming East Asia and the Pacific Regional Consultation, to be held in Cambodia in early 2005.

Having mentioned those positive developments, we are cognizant of the fact that there remains much to be desired. In some areas, as pointed out by the Secretary-General, political instability, armed conflict and other crises have slowed the follow-up process. In all four major goal areas, while substantial progress has been reported, so have difficulties and challenges. Whether for reasons such as the lack of firm funding commitments for long-term financing for vaccines, shortages in resources for and lack of adequate attention to safe motherhood initiatives, limited access to safe drinking water, low coverage of programmes for parent care practices, the continuing disparities in primary and secondary education, the growing number of HIV/AIDS orphans, widespread child trafficking, the commercial sexual exploitation of children or child abuse, those difficulties and challenges demand that we be more resilient and vigorous in our efforts. Only then shall we be able to sustain the progress achieved and record further gains. We totally agree with the Secretary-General that those efforts need to be supported by resource allocations and by actions at the political level. The United Nations in general, and UNICEF in particular, should be encouraged and supported to make still greater contributions to that process.

As a reflection of the Vietnamese Government's policy attaching paramount importance to the protection and care of children and considering children as the future of the country, the delegation of Viet Nam, led by its former Vice President, participated actively in the special session of the General Assembly on children in May 2002. In implementation of our commitments and our long-term strategy and action plan for the protection and care of children, we have tried to bring into full play domestic resources combined with external assistance, working closely with our partners and with all stakeholders in developing and implementing projects with a view to ensuring the most effective utilization of funds.

In an effort to streamline the Government and forge better coordination, the National Committee for the Protection and Care of Children was recently merged into a new National Committee, also under the leadership of a Minister who is in charge not only of children but family and population activities as well.

I am pleased to report to the Assembly on several encouraging achievements in Viet Nam. One hundred per cent of the provinces and cities have attained the goal of universal primary education; illiteracy has been wiped out nationally; 95 per cent of children are enrolled in primary schools at their proper age; the mortality rate among children under the age of five has been reduced to 42 per thousand; 93.3 per cent of children under one year of age have been vaccinated with all six vaccines; polio has been eradicated; and 70 per cent of orphans are taken care of by their communities.

However, like other developing countries, we are still facing numerous problems and challenges, including the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, the effects of HIV/AIDS on children and the shortage of resources, to mention only a few. In our continued efforts to sustain progress and overcome problems and challenges, we are enjoying valuable support and assistance from United Nations agencies — especially UNICEF — donor countries and domestic and foreign non-governmental organizations. On behalf on my Government, I wish to extend to them all our most sincere gratitude.

Mr. Gadhavi (India): We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (A/59/274). We have read this report with interest.

The special session of the General Assembly on children, held in 2002, as well as the current report, recognized the important dividends that investments in children could reap in terms of a long-term impact on poverty eradication, socio-economic progress and sustainable development. It was recognized at the 2002 special session that the resources promised at the 1990 World Summit for Children had not been forthcoming. The plan of action adopted by the special session, therefore, devoted a separate chapter to the mobilization of resources, based on the realization that implementation would not be possible without additional resources, both in the national and the international context. Developed countries undertook a number of commitments with regard to the provision of official development assistance (ODA), bilateral official debt and market access in the plan of action adopted by the special session.

The report of the Secretary-General acknowledges problems of funding challenges and resource shortages in sections relating to immunization, safe motherhood and the study on violence against children, but the section entitled "Ways Forward" refers only to the need for ensuring adequate and sustained national budget allocations for children, supplemented by donor assistance where needed. The report lacks even a passing call on all countries to follow up on the Monterrey Consensus in order to increase financing for development. There is also no analysis of whether or not movement in recent years has been in the right direction.

The goal of a "world fit for children" can be achieved only if lack of resources does not constrain progress. While the negative trend in the core resources of UNICEF has been reversed, the actual gain in its core resources, taking into account unfavourable exchange rates, has been marginal. Even the modest needs of the Roll Back Malaria campaign are far from fulfilled. Progress on commitments made by the developed countries with regard to ODA, bilateral official debt and market access also needs to be dramatically accelerated. Future reports dealing with the follow-up to the special session on children would therefore be incomplete without a focus on the question of resources and the commitments made by developed countries in the Plan of Action.

Efforts aimed at poverty alleviation must begin with children. In fact, economists even say that the nutritional status of children under the age of five is the most sensitive indicator of the development of a particular region. The Government of India considers the development of children to be an important concern and firmly believes that, in the ultimate analysis, it is the healthy development of children that holds the key, and sets the limits for, the future development of society. Efforts are therefore being made by India in that direction. Children have been put at the top of national priorities — calling for focused, time-bound action by all concerned.

India has the largest child population in the world, with about 157 million children below the age of six years. Through the integrated child development services (ICDS) programme, which began in 1975, services are being provided to over 41 million beneficiaries, comprising over 34 million children in the 0 to 6 age group and over 7 million pregnant and lactating mothers. The programme, which was started as a social experiment with 33 projects in the country, has emerged as a unique, and perhaps the largest, early childhood development programme in the world, with more than 5,650 projects across the country as of September 2004. The Government of India is committed to universalizing the ICDS programme to cover all children. There is also an effort under way to double the nutritional component under the scheme.

Another major initiative, in the form of a national nutrition mission, has been launched to ensure holistic and coordinated intervention to combat malnutrition. Under the aegis of this mission, the Government is providing assistance for a pilot project in 51 districts, under which food grain is being provided to families of undernourished adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women. The programme is specifically designed to reach disadvantaged and low-income groups, with the aim of effectively reducing disparities. ICDS has been a powerful outreach programme in the effort to achieve major national nutrition, health and education goals, as embodied in our national plan of action for children.

Education is recognized as a vital component in the development of children. The eighty-sixth amendment act to our Constitution was notified on 13 December 2002, making free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, or Campaign for Education for All, is the Government of India's national programme to achieve the universalization of elementary education, as mandated by the eighty-sixth amendment.

Despite the gigantic dimension of our challenges, India's achievements vis-à-vis all indicators for children over the past decade have been positive. For example, the infant mortality rate declined from 146 per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 80 per 1,000 in 1990 and 70 per 1,000 in 2000. The prevalence of severe and moderate degrees of malnutrition among children declined steadily from 1974 to 2000. Primary school enrolment rates increased from 38 per cent in 1951 to 80 per cent in 2000. The availability of safe drinking water improved significantly — from 68 per cent in 1990 to 78 per cent in 2000. The country has succeeded in eliminating nutritional deficiency syndromes such as beriberi, pellagra and scurvy.

India's commitment to the rights of the child is civilizational, and it is enshrined in our Constitution.

India has one of the most comprehensive legal regimes for the protection of children. The Constitution of India, which was adopted in 1950, articulates, in substantial measure, several of the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our national policies have seen rapid progress since independence, and we have tried to provide maximum outreach for our programmes for children. We realize that we still have a long road ahead, and we are committed to ensuring the rights, protection and complete development of every child in our country.

It is our belief that the actualization of children's rights cannot be accomplished by Government action alone. While such action is a prerequisite for establishing the enabling legal and policy environment and for initiating and implementing major national programmes, requisite public awareness and information is vital to bring about attitudinal change. That can only be brought about by a complementary and dynamic partnership between non-governmental organizations, social activists and grassroots field workers, including the participation of civil society. A conducive international cooperation framework, as recognized in the Convention, is also essential to enable States with limited resources to fulfil their goals and aspirations. In that context, we would like to acknowledge our extremely productive partnership with UNICEF.

Mr. Baduri (Eritrea): The delegation of the State of Eritrea would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children, which is contained in document A/59/274.

The report notes the progress made and the obstacles overcome by States in the formulation and consolidation of national plans of action designed to enable them to implement the commitments made during the special session. Yet, it also makes it clear that no significant achievements have been made during the two years following the summit. It is also evident that developing States faced major problems in implementation because of the paucity of their resources and the inadequacy of the promised, but not delivered, external assistance to which developed States had committed themselves during the summit.

The Government of Eritrea has taken in earnest its commitments to achieve the four goals identified by the special session to be incorporated into national plans of action. It should be noted that, long before the holding of the summit, our Government had accorded top priority to that matter and had already launched special programmes to promote and protect the rights of children on the basis of our country's macroeconomic policy, which was adopted in 1996. Those programmes were administered and supervised by government institutions and the National Union of Eritrean Women. The summit's four goals were therefore meaningfully added to those already existing in national programmes. Consequently, new programmes were launched to accommodate the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the summit's declaration, entitled "A world fit for children". In addition, today the promotion and protection of children is ensured by programmes managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Eritrean integrated early childhood development programme, which is administered and supervised by the Ministry of Education.

Eritrea's overall policy and guidelines regarding children include, inter alia, the enactment of laws to protect the rights of children; strengthening the family unit, which is regarded as the primary source of children's emotional and material comfort; creating preventive and rehabilitative programmes designed to ameliorate conditions and mitigate the suffering of children, especially traumatized and destitute children; and promoting integrated development programmes.

In that connection, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has been taking appropriate action with regard, inter alia, to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To that end, the Ministry has conducted numerous awareness workshops. That programme is continuing at the regional and subregional levels throughout the country, focusing especially on leaders of civil society and community elders, as well as on religious leaders and teachers. The Ministry has also translated the Convention's articles into six of Eritrea's languages, disseminating those translations through the mass media. It also submitted a detailed and updated country report on the implementation of the Convention.

With regard to assistance to orphans, national surveys on orphaned children were conducted in 1993 and 1999, on the basis of which steps were taken to reunify over 47,000 orphans with their extended families, namely, close relatives, including adult brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts. That was

accompanied by the allocation of approximately $12 million to assist orphans and to establish community-based group-care systems and institutional care centres. In addition, adoption arrangements, by both Eritrean and foreign families, are made when circumstances are favourable.

With regard to support for children with HIV/AIDS, which has become a threat to children as the number of victims continues to increase daily despite strict controls, the Government has thus far identified some children with HIV/AIDS, including about 1,750 orphans, and is providing them with assistance to cover the costs of medicine and living allowances.

With regard to support for street children and young commercial sex workers, the Government has created a system of reintegration with blood relatives and has developed a vocational training system and a system of employment in income-generating activities. In that connection, over 1,500 families of street and working children were given assistance through income-generating schemes. More than 800 street and working children were enrolled in vocational training centres and were later able to gain employment. And 56 children were rehabilitated through counselling services and given training in catering, basic computer skills and driving, and provided with jobs.

The Eritrean integrated early childhood development programme focuses on assistance to children below the age of six years, but has included elementary school children and even children caught in abnormal situations, including war. The programme's mission statement is to improve the health and diet of children, offer early learning opportunities and improved elementary education, render psychological assistance to children affected by abnormal conditions, including wars, and, where applicable, change adverse traditional and social attitudes related to children, particularly girls.

The objectives of the programme are to create educational centres; train teachers and care-givers; prepare teaching materials; arrange workshops and adult education mass-media programmes related to the use of medicines, nutrition, the use of oral rehydration salts, hygiene and the effects of circumcision on children; and the provision of clean water. The objectives also include providing health care, including school-based delivery of health services, and improving child and maternal nutrition.

Significant successes have been registered in those programmes, improving access to health services, reducing infant and child mortality, providing safe drinking water, reducing the number of vaccine-preventable childhood diseases and expanding health care and the kindergarten and elementary school infrastructure. Yet, much remains to be improved. The number of schools is multiplying. The quality of teaching and the classroom environment are better than before. However, there is still a growing demand for kindergartens and elementary education. More children have access to clean water, but more have yet to benefit from such a basic necessity.

Young children, and girls in particular, continue to work, especially in domestic labour and home-based work. Child trafficking is negligible, but it has not been eliminated. Street children, who are vulnerable to abuse and violence, are receiving care and assistance, but it has not been enough. The victims of war, including in particular those disabled by landmines and unexploded ordnance, have been receiving attention, but not enough.

The Government of Eritrea takes the interests of its citizens very seriously and recognizes its responsibility to them. It has enacted the necessary laws and created the necessary mechanisms to confront the problems exacerbated by a recent bloody war to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Yet, it does not have all the resources to overcome them.

Mr. Ashiru (Nigeria): My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/59/274, on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children and submitted in response to resolutions 58/157 and 58/282. We also wish to acknowledge the efforts of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in caring for children.

The report before us provides the updates on the progress made in implementing the outcome document of the special session on children. Under the Declaration and Plan of Action, we committed ourselves to a time-bound set of goals for children and young people. In particular, we agreed to focus on four key areas: promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children against abuse,

exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS. The agreed agenda for children strongly reinforces the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals. I wish to reaffirm that plans are currently under way in Nigeria to incorporate and translate those commitments into national policies for children.

Nigeria believes that meeting the goals to create a world fit for children is crucial to the development of Member States. The Government of Nigeria continues to build on the gains it has made in the various child development areas, which include the enactment of laws related to the prohibition of early marriage and the retention of girls in schools. Those efforts have resulted in some modest achievements in the field of education, especially with regard to the number of girls enrolled in primary schools. In the area of child health, for example, immunization coverage has been improved immensely. The Government also continues to increase its efforts to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other preventable diseases that affect mostly children. In order to fight that scourge, the Government of Nigeria, along with other African countries, remains committed to the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria, tuberculosis and related diseases.

For its part, Nigeria has established the National Scientific Institute for Research on HIV/AIDS as a matter of priority. Furthermore, additional policies are in place to strengthen public awareness programmes with regard to the prevention and treatment of these diseases. In that connection, the Nigerian Government welcomes the outcome of the recently held International AIDS Conference, which took place in Bangkok. We acknowledge the collective efforts of United Nations agencies and all stakeholders to stem the spread of the disease around the world.

Furthermore, the Government has adopted a regional approach in the polio immunization programme. Accordingly, in cooperation with six neighbouring States where polio has re-emerged, immunization programmes continue to be undertaken simultaneously in the affected countries to ensure maximum effectiveness.

In demonstration of our commitment to the implementation of the outcome of the special session, we have opened additional avenues to facilitate easier and more widespread dissemination of the outcome. The strategies adopted include the establishment of the Child Rights Information Bureau, the creation of a children's parliament, the annual celebration of such events as Children's Day and Day of the African Child, and a regional monitoring centre in Nigeria established by the African Network for Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect, to monitor violations of children's rights.

The Nigerian Government has also put in place policies and programmes aimed at combating hunger, especially as it affects children. The goal is to ensure the nutritional safety of children, as well as that of the population. That is done through the implementation of a wide range of initiatives.

In order to facilitate that, further efforts are also being made to address poverty at the grassroots level, particularly through the poverty adjustment programme, which is aimed at reducing poverty at the rural level as part of the Government's poverty alleviation programme. In addition, the Federal Government has made primary school education free and compulsory under the universal basic education programme.

It is regrettable that there are increasingly frequent incidents of child trafficking, particularly in the West Africa subregion. However, we remain steadfast in addressing the issue in Nigeria. In that regard, the Government has enacted an act prohibiting human trafficking. Among other things, the act provides for the maintenance of effective communication to facilitate the rapid distribution of information on this offence. The act also prohibits forced labour and other forms of child abuse.

My delegation is deeply concerned about the conscription of children into armed conflict. Consequently, it is not surprising that, in the most recent areas of conflict in Africa, children have not only become the targets of violence but, worse still, they have been turned into the perpetrators of violence. That poses a serious challenge to Africa and the international community. We therefore call for an intensification of international efforts and cooperation to arrest that development in order to protect children from the scourge of war and sexual exploitation. For that reason, it is necessary for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes to be comprehensive enough to include the rehabilitation of children who have engaged in conflict. In that way, children would no longer suffer the indignity and

atrocities of war, whether as perpetrators or targets of violence.

We are also concerned about the effects on children of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other childhood diseases. Regrettably, despite concerted efforts to control those scourges, they still continue to kill many children and adults in Africa. As the report of the Secretary-General points out, 15 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS around the world. The majority of the dead are in sub-Saharan Africa. The report also estimates that, by the year 2010, over 18 million children in sub-Saharan Africa will lose their parents owing to HIV. That places a lot of responsibilities on children and their depleted families. This is a frightening development that should be arrested by the international community.

We welcome the statement in the report of the Secretary-General that three quarters of the world's children received immunization, averting an estimated 2.5 million deaths each year. In that regard, we once again wish to acknowledge the efforts of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund. However, we regret to note that the same report indicates that 1.4 million children under the age of 5 die annually from preventable diseases. The report also states that some 30,000 young lives are lost every day to preventable causes. If those trends continue, the goal of reducing infant and under-five mortality rates by 2015, as envisaged by the Millennium Declaration, is already a very tall order for African countries.

In our view, the issues that we are committed to solving are clearly developmental in nature. They can therefore be effectively addressed only if the international community is genuinely committed to provide the requisite resources. The main constraints to the achievement of the goals of the special session by developing countries include inadequate resources, the debt burden and the decline in traditional funding to implement identified programmes. Similarly, the growing inequality arising from globalization, which is resulting in the inability of developing countries to service their debts, constitutes a further constraint. The meagre revenue of debt-strapped developing countries is used to service ever-increasing debt. That leaves such countries with little or nothing to provide basic infrastructure — particularly schools, health services, roads and potable water — for the population.

We believe that the excessive debt burden of developing countries has exacerbated the incidence of poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment in developing countries. As a result, the capacity of wage earners in traditional family systems to provide mutual support and basic needs to families has been eroded. The resulting overall effect is that children in such circumstances become vulnerable to abuse, violence and exploitation. However, as a first step, that problem can be addressed by strengthening the institution of the family as the basic unit of society. In that regard, we should remember that strong family bonds, among other factors, provide the necessary environment to cushion and protect children from the numerous threats and pressures they face.

In conclusion, we call for increased official development assistance to developing countries, especially to African countries, to enable them to implement the programmes necessary to combat HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for the international community, in particular the Bretton Woods institutions, to address the debt problem of developing countries. It is obvious that any society that neglects the welfare of its children puts its future in jeopardy. Therefore, in order to secure a hopeful future for our children, we must restore acceptable traditional family values to prevent the world from sliding into lawlessness, hatred and violence. Accordingly, we call upon the United Nations and the international community to work together for world peace, justice and development, to ensure that we bequeath hope to our children and to enable our children to fulfil their dreams and potential

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Let me, at the outset, express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report A/59/274) on the follow-up to the outcome of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly and the progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in its Plan of Action, entitled "A world fit for children".

As indicated in the report, different countries have intensified their efforts to incorporate into their national strategies the commitments set forth during the special session. Given that only two years have passed since the holding of the special session, we must redouble our efforts towards the realization of the goals set out at the session.

In the past few years, there has been a growing discussion about where we as a global community should be heading with respect to the well-being and survival of children. In that regard, on different occasions, including during the Millennium Summit, here in New York, the international community made it clear that there exists a direct link between the survival and development of children and women and that of their societies. Indeed, many of the major goals envisaged at the Millennium Summit relate to the health and well-being of children and women. The Millennium Development Goals clearly indicate that individual well-being is a prerequisite for economic and social development.

Despite the increased efforts and the relative progress achieved in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the commitments made at the special session on children, the general situation of children in most parts of the world has yet to be improved. Millions still live in poverty, have no access to education and are being forced to work under conditions in which they are exploited and abused and continue to suffer from the worst forms of child labour, as well as other forms of exploitation such as trafficking, prostitution, pornography, sexual abuse and harassment.

It is sad to learn — as UNICEF's 2003 annual report informs us — that an estimated 1.2 million children are being trafficked each year, thus becoming subject to the most serious forms of human rights violations while at the same time being deprived of their right to grow up in a family environment. In addition, trafficked children face a range of dangers, including violence and sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is a daunting challenge and a public health problem in many areas across the world. About 1 million children — mainly girls, but also a significant number of boys — are exploited every year in the multi-billion-dollar sex industry. Child sexual abuse is a pervasive problem that affects individuals of all backgrounds.

As the facts on the ground illustrate, an estimated 246 million children are engaged in exploitative child labour. It is also estimated that 100 million children worldwide have disabilities, many of which have been caused by armed conflicts and political violence. Those children are denied access to education, family life, adequate health care and the right to participate in the normal activities of childhood. Furthermore, in many cases those children are more vulnerable to abuse and neglect by the adults who are responsible for them. All of those bitter facts warn us that the world is still far from being a fit place for children and that there still remains much more to be done before the international community reaches its goals in that respect.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that for the full and harmonious development of personality, a child should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Children who have been deprived of the protection of a family are more likely to be victims of the worst forms of mistreatment and abuse. The role of parents or legal guardians and their responsibilities for the children in their care are also important for the steady, normal and positive growth of children. Undeniably, the protection and promotion of the rights of the child begins at home. To provide a natural, healthy and affectionate environment for the growth and well-being of children, the institution of the family needs to be supported and strengthened in all societies.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, being fully committed to the welfare of children, has extensively focused on areas of child well-being. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, my Government has seriously pursued the effective realization of the objectives set forth in that Convention. Accordingly, a large portion of our national budget has been allocated to various aspects of social affairs including education, health, nutrition, social security, rehabilitation, physical training, skill development and research. Clearly, those are the areas that directly affect the survival and well-being of children. Moreover, special attention has also been paid to targeting the less developed parts of the country.

Steps have also been taken to revise the rules of procedure regarding juvenile crime with a view to introducing international standards and rules — particularly those enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child — into our legal system. Accordingly, special courts for children have been set up to deal with offences committed by offenders under the age of 18. In order to raise public awareness on the rights of children in various segments of society, a number of training workshops have been organized in many parts of the country in collaboration with the UNICEF office in Tehran. In addition, the prison administration has constructed and opened

rehabilitation centres in many provinces for children who commit offences and are convicted by special juvenile courts. Consequently, all relevant provincial authorities are now bound to transfer prisoners under the age of 18 to the newly built rehabilitation centres. We hope that those measures will allow for the more effective fulfilment of the tasks enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Before concluding, let me reiterate our belief that the present deliberations on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children is an important opportunity to recall our collective responsibility to ensure children's rights and to reaffirm our commitment to those fundamental rights. We stand ready to cooperate with all relevant bodies of the world Organization, and in particular with UNICEF, to strengthen the follow-up process to the special session on children and to enhance the monitoring mechanism to be sure that we achieve the goals set out in recent important documents to ensure a world fit for children. The Islamic Republic of Iran firmly pledges its support to that end and looks forward to the commemorative plenary meeting scheduled to take place in 2007.

Ms. Davtyan (Armenia): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and informative report submitted under the agenda item before us.

The 2002 special session on children renewed and reinforced global commitment to the cause of children. The international community pledged to build "A world fit for children" by promoting children's health, providing quality education, combating HIV/AIDS and protecting children from violence and exploitation.

To follow up on the regional implementation of "A world fit for children", the Second Intergovernmental Conference on Making Europe and Central Asia Fit for Children was held in Sarajevo in May 2004. Armenia participated actively and constructively at that Conference, paying particular attention to the issues of investing in children, making cities fit for children and violence against children.

Taking up the challenge to ensure children's right to grow up in health, peace and dignity is a primary responsibility of national Governments. In Armenia — despite the difficulties posed by political and socio-economic transition, aggravated by the influx of refugees and blockades — the problems of children, their well-being and protection, have been a constant focus of our Government and society. In 2004 the Government of Armenia adopted a National Plan of Action for the Protection of the Rights of the Child for the period 2004 to 2015. The National Plan of Action launches a comprehensive policy and sets up mechanisms to help to identify existing problems and develop child-oriented projects to be implemented by State and non-State actors with clearly defined responsibilities. The National Plan of Action is also linked with Armenia's poverty reduction strategy programme, which, in turn, stresses the provision of social assistance to children.

The development of international cooperation and establishment of effective partnerships with all stakeholders is essential to move the agenda on children forward at both the national and international levels. My delegation would like to express its most sincere appreciation to the relevant international agencies, particularly UNICEF, as well as other donor Governments and non-governmental organizations, for their continued assistance and support to national efforts to better the lives of children in Armenia.

We are pleased to note the positive results brought about by those joint efforts in the four major areas identified in the outcome document of the 2002 special session. In particular, during the past years there has been significant progress in the area of health care. With the support of UNICEF, Armenia maintained a high immunization rate and was certified polio-free in 2002. Through joint efforts, we succeeded in achieving the reduction of child mortality and are approaching universal salt iodization, currently at an 84 per cent rate.

In the area of education, life-skills-based education has been integrated into the primary school curriculum with UNICEF's support. With regard to combating HIV/AIDS, a national programme on HIV/AIDS prevention was launched, which, inter alia, seeks to prevent mother-to-child transmission and the spread of the disease among youth. Some measures have been undertaken with regard to especially vulnerable groups of children. Child welfare reforms, including national laws for children deprived of parental care and legislation on juvenile justice, have been introduced. Community-based alternative models for children with disabilities and children at risk have also been established.

In June, the UNICEF Executive Board approved the country programme document for Armenia for 2005 to 2009, which will concentrate mostly on issues of health, early childhood development and child protection. It is very important that the programme pay specific attention and reach out to the problems of the socially most disadvantaged groups, in particular refugee and disabled children. We look forward to furthering our fruitful cooperation with UNICEF and the effective implementation of the programme.

Allow me specifically to refer to the issue of child protection. Violence against and exploitation of children are unacceptable and shameful phenomena; the international community must spare no effort in eradicating them. Trafficking is one of the worst manifestations of such violence. To combat that newly emerged scourge, the Government approved a national action plan for the prevention of trafficking in persons for the period of 2004 to 2006, which gives proper consideration to the problems of child trafficking. Armenia is a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Armenia is also signatory to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the other on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The process of ratification of both of those instruments is under way.

In the context of our global efforts to combat violence against children, Armenia welcomes the work carried out by the independent expert, Mr. Pinheiro, and looks forward to the United Nations study on that important issue. We believe that the thorough examination of the causes and nature of violence against children will provide us with a better understanding of how to fight this evil and will help in developing more effective national and international policies to redress and prevent that scourge.

In 2005, the international community will review the progress made in the implementation of the global development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals. The linkages between the agenda of "A World Fit for Children" and the Millennium Declaration are evident. Ensuring the rights and well-being of children today and bringing up a healthy, educated and socially competent generation is a prerequisite for peace, security, and prosperity tomorrow. It is therefore important to fully utilize the potential of "A World Fit for Children" for achieving the overarching goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that Armenia stands ready to continue its efforts towards these goals.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Barnes (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) attributes the utmost importance to the special session on children and its outcomes. Children and young people around the world are the keys to our future. We believe in the important role that the United Nations system can play in safeguarding the interests of children everywhere. I am proud, as a Vice President of the IFRC and President of the Canadian Red Cross, to have this opportunity to present our message to the United Nations General Assembly. I am especially proud since this follows an IFRC presentation to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which was made by my colleague, Judy Fairholm, the coordinator of our Canadian Red Cross programme on violence and child abuse, known as RespectEd.

Our message is straightforward. It begins and ends with the unnecessary violence that is targeted at young people. The harsh fact is that in many countries the rights of children are regularly violated. Our children are now living in a world where violence is commonplace and is seen as a normal process for solving problems, a world where abuse through crime, trafficking, prostitution, ignorance and poverty are regularly condemned, but without any real action taken to confront it.

The dramatic and catastrophic effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on children are both underestimated and underaddressed by a number of Governments, the media and many relevant organizations. Those effects have been identified for some time, but many Governments have yet to incorporate that dimension into their national policies.

This September, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Africa held their sixth pan-African conference in Algiers. At that meeting it was noted that

the number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS continues to grow. It is predicted that this number will reach 18 million by the year 2010. The key objectives listed in the plan of action adopted at that conference are of fundamental importance. The most significant objectives within the present context are as follows: first, the need for a serious commitment on the part of Governments to fight the stigma and discrimination associated with both HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS orphaned children; secondly, the importance of a commitment to fight the pandemic through education; and thirdly, the need for a commitment to provide psychosocial support for affected children, families and communities.

There are still many countries and organizations that have yet to introduce special policies to address the unique needs of these children. The IFRC strongly believes that policies should be created to help HIV/AIDS-orphaned children thrive by enabling them to become productive and contributing members of society. Only through a policy-based approach will countries be able to successfully emerge from the devastation being caused by HIV/AIDS.

Our statement is a call for more action and support for the role that our national societies play as auxiliaries to their Governments. In this respect, we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Governments and donors that have recognized the special efforts of our programmes to assist children. One such example is a programme located in southern Africa and funded by the Governments of Ireland, Sweden and the Netherlands. This programme is aimed at improving the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS-affected orphans. Another example is a programme being run by the Zimbabwe Red Cross. It is entitled "training for life" and gives particular attention to training children who are the heads of families.

It is important that we learn from the ways resilient communities overcome these challenges, even under the most difficult and seemingly insurmountable situations. The lessons learned from such situations can be applied elsewhere, even to less dramatic situations. Learning is sharing, and this is one of the contributions that our network can impart. We have a depth that reaches broad areas and levels, spanning from our work with this General Assembly to the most remote field stations.

This is why we at the Canadian Red Cross are so committed to working through the IFRC and our network to share the lessons we learned with others, and also to benefit from their experiences. Our antiviolence and abuse prevention programme for children, RespectEd, is one programme that we feel is important in terms of the information that we can share. We believe in the common goal of creating "A world fit for children".

We call upon all States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to comply with the principles outlined in the Convention. We believe that it is one of the most effective and responsible treaties. Its objectives are of noble consequence and will lead to the furtherance of the principles outlined during the General Assembly's special session on children.

Our other message is that all of us should increasingly try to integrate children in the design and implementation of programmes and policies that are of relevance to them. This is an issue that we believe is noteworthy and that we are including in our work. We look forward to working with the United Nations and other relevant bodies and organizations to that end.

The IFRC is presently analysing our relationship with other international organizations. We are giving priority to those that are structured in ways that promote the cooperation of the national level of their organizations with our national societies. Such is our relationship with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a primary and very valued partner in many activities and particularly in this area. This is an important process, which will facilitate our work and the achievement of Millennium Development Goal No. 8, concerning the improvement of partnerships for development. It is also our intention to keep all Member States fully informed of our work, since it can give support to their work to alleviate the plight and suffering of vulnerable people and especially children.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate recipients of the United Nations Development Programme Youth Poverty Eradication Awards, namely Samuel Magassosso from Mozambique, Edith Castillo Núñez from Panama, Bessie Maruia from Papua New Guinea, Mirzokhaydar Isoev from Tajikistan, and Bader Zama'rah from the occupied Palestinian territory. Their work shows the spirit of young people and their ability to achieve great things in this world.

In 1983, John Whitehead wrote, "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." This statement, made over 20 years ago, continues to be a poignant reminder of our obligation to leave a valuable legacy to the following generations. It is our hope that the tools outlined in the special session will send a stronger message to the future: a message of safety, stability and overall well-being.

The President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting. I call on the representative of Israel, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and five for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): It is regrettable that I am forced to reply to the statement made by the Syrian representative, who has unfortunately exploited today's debate on this vital global issue in order to advance a narrow and partisan political agenda. It is puzzling that the Syrian delegate chose to attack what he called Israeli occupation just one day after the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, voted to approve the disengagement plan, according to which the Israeli military and civilian presence will be removed from Gaza and the northern West Bank in the coming year. Before the vote on that issue, Prime Minister Sharon stated,

> "I support the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel. I have repeatedly and openly said that I am willing to make painful compromises in order to put an end to this ongoing and malignant conflict between those who struggle over this land, and that I would do my utmost in order to bring peace."

The same cannot, however, be said for Syria — a dictatorship that continues to occupy a neighbouring State, an occupation with no end in sight. Just last week, the Security Council "noted with concern" in a presidential statement that the requirements of resolution 1559 (2004), such as the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and the disarming of armed groups there, have not been met. In reporting on Syrian non-compliance in his report, S/2004/777, the Secretary-General made clear that, "to the best of our ability to ascertain, the only significant foreign forces deployed in Lebanon, as of 30 September 2004, are Syrian" and that, "The most significant remaining armed group is Hezbollah".

The continued murderous presence of the Hezbollah in Lebanon, under the watchful eye of the Syrian occupation, is not a mere coincidence. Syria is known for sponsoring, financing and harbouring terrorism — in violation of the most basic norms of international law. It allows Hezbollah to operate in Syrian-occupied Lebanon and allows Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups to maintain their headquarters in its capital, Damascus.

Let us not forget that scores of Israeli children and youth have been killed by such terrorists in buses, restaurants, private parties, and even during religious celebrations, while hundreds more have been permanently injured and disabled. In each instance, they were the tragic, innocent victims of brutal, indiscriminate terrorism. The Syrian speaker has voiced his sympathy with the plight of the Palestinian children. Perhaps the Syrian delegate can explain to me why the hundreds of Israeli children killed or maimed in brutal terrorist attacks deserved less sympathy and attention? Why did the suffering of those victims and their families in trying to cope with loss and tragedy deserve no mention? Perhaps the cause of the silence lies in the fact that Syria has a direct stake in that wanton murder.

Take, for example, Tomer Almog, aged nine, who was killed along with his grandparents, his father and his cousin in the Islamic Jihad suicide attack on the Maxim restaurant in Haifa on 4 October of last year. He was butchered together with 16 other civilians, including four children. That attack was planned and orchestrated from Islamic Jihad headquarters in Damascus. Aviel Atash, aged three, was another victim of Syrian-sponsored terrorism. He was one of 19 civilians killed in a double suicide bus bombing in Bersheba on 31 August of this year. He was returning home with his mother from a trip to the mall to buy supplies for his first day of nursery school, which was to start the next morning. Sixteen other children were gravely wounded. That gruesome massacre was carried out by the Hebron branch of the Hamas, which receives its instructions directly from the Hamas command in Damascus.

Millions of Arab and Israeli children are growing up in a reality of conflict, hate, violence, incitement

and bloodshed. Those children will design the nature of our coexistence in the next generation. The death of any child — Arab or Israeli — is a terrible tragedy. Our first goal is to ensure that children in our region will grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. In order to achieve that, terrorism must stop and those supporting terrorism, like Syria, must be brought to account and must be granted no immunity from the consequences of their actions.

Mr. Attieh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am sorry for taking the floor at this late hour, but I would like to reply to the statement made by the representative of Israel in his attempt to pull the wool over our eyes and once again blot out facts before this Assembly. Today, we are discussing the question of children in armed conflict. It is our belief that occupation is the highest form of armed conflict. I have not heard or read in the reports from the occupied Arab territories — be it in the UNRWA report or the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, which includes the occupied Syrian Golan — that Israeli occupation forces bring welfare and prosperity to children under Israeli occupation. On the contrary, those forces violate the children's rights, oppress them and deprive them of their most fundamental rights to life. In his briefing last Friday before the Security Council, Under-Secretary-General Prendergast stated that the Israeli occupation forces, during the past three years, had killed 3,800 Palestinian civilians, including 400 children. The most recent instance of that was the killing of two Palestinian children in their classroom. That is in addition to the acts of murder committed against Palestinian students at schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). If the representative of Israel intends to draw the attention of the delegations away from the truth of the terrorist practices of his Government, we would like to draw attention to the fact that Israel practices State terrorism in the fullest sense of the word. Israeli forces kill people and destroy houses with their inhabitants still inside, in violation of all norms of international law.

The representative of Israel also spoke of compliance with internationally binding resolutions. He is certainly the last person entitled to speak about compliance, given that the Security Council has adopted dozens of resolutions calling on Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories and to work towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. There are also hundreds of General Assembly resolutions calling on Israel to withdraw from those territories.

The representative of Israel stated that the Council recently adopted a resolution on Lebanon, and he claimed that Syria was present in Lebanon as an occupation force. The entire international community knows that Syria has a presence in Lebanon under a bilateral agreement between the two countries to stabilize the situation in Lebanon — a situation created by Israel, one way or another.

I do not wish to speak at length, but I do not want anyone to be deceived by these Israeli allegations. The representative of Israel is attempting to divert attention from his country's heinous practices in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Our statement this afternoon deals only with the tip of the iceberg. We appeal to the international community and to the representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Olara Otunnu, to continue their efforts to expose such Israeli practices by drawing attention to the situation of children under Israeli occupation and to compel Israel to respect their rights, especially their right to life.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): It is regrettable that I am forced once again to reply to the statement made by the Syrian representative. Unfortunately, if we must talk about the situation of Palestinian children, let me say that, since the outbreak of the Palestinian terrorist intifada in September 2000, Israel has found itself facing a particularly difficult situation in which terrorist organizations, many of which are acting on instructions received from headquarters sheltered in Damascus, have made increasing use of children and minors in acts of violence against Israelis.

A growing number of children have been directly involved in carrying out such attacks. The average age of suicide terrorists is becoming ever lower. Palestinian children have also participated in violent incidents by serving as human shields for terrorists standing directly behind them.

We must ask, when a Palestinian child is, unfortunately, wounded or even — God forbid —

killed, what that child was doing in such close proximity to terrorists. The cynical use of children as pawns in the conflict begins in the educational system. Palestinian textbooks, many of which have been recently published by the Palestinian Authority itself, openly teach hatred of Israel and Israelis. Materials published and broadcast in the official media reinforce these lessons, and much of such incitement is aimed at children. Such programmes are produced not only by the Palestinian Authority; recently, a series of programmes — now being screened, during the month of Ramadan — was produced by Syrian television.

Such programmes encourage Palestinian children to hate Israelis and to take part in the violence. Children are urged by television advertisements to "drop your toys and take up arms". While Palestinian educational television programming glorifies martyrdom in the struggle against Israel, the latest children's video, played at least 10 times last week on Palestinian television, has the following chorus:

> "You will not be saved, O Zionist.
> You are my target.
> I will willingly fall as a martyr.
> O young ones, God is great."

Such exploitation and manipulation of children — sometimes as young as 7 or 8 years old — is a blatant violation of the basic principles of international law and of the basic rights of children. This phenomenon should be of great concern to the international community.

Mr. Atieh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I regret to have to take the floor once again, but I should like to make two points.

First, the representative of Israel referred to the presence of Palestinian headquarters in Damascus. Those Palestinians present in Syria are refugees, expelled by Israel from their homeland by force, who have found shelter in neighbouring States. Syria and other Arab States have received them and provided them with the means to make a living. They perform only information-related activities and are engaged in no other activities whatsoever. The representative of Israel is attempting once again to sell his allegations to the international community.

Secondly, regarding education, Syrian curricula call for tolerance and coexistence among all peoples and religions and in no way incite anyone to violence. Israel is the one that incites such violence by practising it and by committing murder. These Israeli allegations will fool no one.

I will not speak at further length at this late hour.

Programme of work

The President (*spoke in French*): Before we adjourn, I would like to bring to the attention of members a matter concerning agenda item 15 (b), on the election of the members of the Economic and Social Council, that is scheduled to take place at 3 p.m. tomorrow, Thursday, 28 October.

In connection with that sub-item, I should like to draw the attention of members to a letter dated 25 August 2004 addressed to the President of the General Assembly from the Permanent Representative of Greece. This letter has been circulated as document A/59/358. In the letter, the Permanent Representative of Greece announced that Greece will relinquish its seat on the Economic and Social Council in favour of Spain for the year 2005. Consequently, it will be necessary for the Assembly to conduct a by-election to fill that one vacancy, in accordance with rule 140 of the Assembly's rules of procedure.

In that regard, I should like to inform members that tomorrow afternoon, Thursday, 28 October, the General Assembly will first conduct a by-election to fill the one vacancy and then proceed to the election of 18 members of the Economic and Social Council.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.